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LETTER DATED 17 FEBRUARY 1994 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I should like to refer to my letter dated 1 February 1994 (S/1994/109) and your statement dated 3 February 1994 (S/PRST/6) regarding the presence of Croatian Army units in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the statement of 3 February 1994, the Security Council requested that I monitor closely the situation and report to the Council within two weeks on progress towards the complete and full withdrawal of all elements of the Croatian Army (HV) as well as military equipment from the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As mentioned in my letter dated 1 February 1994, the ability of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) to observe developments throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina is limited. UNPROFOR is, therefore, not in a position to verify in a systematic fashion whether all elements of the Croatian Army and the equipment concerned are being withdrawn. The following observations of UNPROFOR should be seen in this context.

On 10 February, UNPROFOR observed a convoy of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), consisting of 21 trucks and other equipment, leaving the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina via the Lipa checkpoint. One of these trucks had markings of the Fifth HV Brigade. The convoy also included a bus carrying 36 soldiers with insignia of an independent Croatian Army unit from Zagreb. The event was videotaped by a uniformed cameraman of the HV or HVO.

In a letter dated 11 February 1994 addressed to me, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Croatia, Dr. Mate Granic, stated, inter alia, that the Republic would approach my Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia, Mr. Yasushi Akashi, to agree on a monitoring mechanism which would verify strict compliance with the Security Council's request.

In a letter dated 15 February 1994 addressed to my Special Representative and the Force Commander of UNPROFOR, the Head of the Office for the United Nations and the European Union of the Croatian Foreign Ministry, Mr. Budimir Plestina, stated, inter alia, that on 16 February Croatian Army elements would leave the front line of the wider region of the river Neretva.

The departure of these elements would commence at 1000 hours and be accomplished by 1700 hours of the same day in the region of Metkovic.

As of 17 February, UNPROFOR has not yet received any concrete proposals for a monitoring arrangement nor have any of the troop movements indicated in the above letter been observed.

In the absence of any observations of HV withdrawal movements beyond that on 10 February, UNPROFOR continues to assess that there still may be 5,000 HV troops in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although no HV command posts nor any full HV brigades operating as formed units have been identified.

It appears that HV troops are now being more circumspect and may be removing their HV insignia while in Bosnia and Herzegovina and replacing them with those of the HVO. UNPROFOR believes that HV insignia on a number of vehicles have been erased or repainted.

UNPROFOR will continue to monitor developments to the extent possible.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI